

**Welcoming Statement**  
**Senator Larry Craig**  
**Forum on Guardianships**  
**U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging**  
**July 22, 2004**

Good afternoon, and welcome to the Senate Special Committee on Aging's forum on guardianship issues. Today, we have brought together a distinguished panel of experts. I am pleased to see another distinguished expert and a very familiar face to the Aging Committee, Barbara Bovbjerg from the Government Accountability Office, who has agreed to moderate the forum this afternoon.

Today's forum will focus on the monitoring and accountability of court appointed guardians responsible for the care and financial management of this country's most vulnerable elderly. Hundreds of thousands of older Americans live under guardianship in the United States. Those numbers will dramatically increase as our aging population continues to grow at a prolific and unprecedented rate.

In February of 2003, the Aging Committee held a hearing exploring the misuse of guardianships imposed over the elderly. During the course of that hearing, I heard several horror stories of elderly Americans put into abusive guardianship situations. At that time I called for the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study on how federal funds are managed by court appointed guardians.

The G.A.O. has since compiled significant information on guardianship programs nationwide with special focus on three key states. They have found that while all states have laws requiring courts to oversee guardianships, the implementation of those laws are varied and sporadic. In fact, most courts surveyed by the G.A.O. did not even track the number of active guardianships or the number of elderly under guardianship.

Another finding is the lack of collaboration between state courts and federal agencies. While both are responsible for assisting many of the same older adults, they communicate little. There is no system in place for federal agencies and courts to notify each other in situations where financial exploitation is detected. The failure to coordinate between agencies can leave this nation's most vulnerable senior citizens without any protection at a time when they need it most.

In light of these concerns, it is my desire that the panel today examine three key issues: First, a review of state laws that provide for oversight of guardianships; Second, identification of state courts that have exemplary training and monitoring practices; and Third, recommendations how state courts and federal representative payee programs serving the same individuals can better coordinate their oversight efforts.

I will now turn the proceedings over to the moderator for today's forum, Barbara Bovbjerg. Ms. Bovbjerg is the acting director for education, workforce and income security issues at the U.S. Government Accountability Office, and is the author of a

recent report examining the collaboration needed to protect incapacitated elderly people. Her background and expertise are impressive, as is that of each of our panelists today.

Once again, thank you for being here today to discuss this very important issue facing the vulnerable elderly. I look forward to reviewing today's discussions.